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## The Wonderful Mystery and Majesty of God

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TEXT: John 16:12-15 (ESV)

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

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Grace to you and peace on this Trinity Sunday from God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This particular day has been set apart in the church year for Christians to reflect on and celebrate the vastness, wonder, and the mystery of our Triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet within the church, we're sometimes a bit hesitant to try to take on the doctrine of the Trinity from the pulpit. It's hard. One English preacher said years ago that any preacher with good sense will call in sick on Trinity Sunday. It is a lofty, challenging subject and it is not simple. But that shouldn't be a surprise for us after all. We're talking about the infinite God of the universe. And perhaps you're someone who doesn't really see any relevance in this for your life and you just haven't been all that interested. Well, the doctrine of the Trinity stands at the very heart of our Christian faith, and therefore it deserves our utmost attention and belief. It paints a beautiful picture for us of the magnificence, the mystery, and the majesty of God. It can bring us to a greater appreciation, joy, and delight in our God as we earnestly contemplate it. It can grow our faith in God.

So first, let's have a brief review of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. There are four things Christians believe about God, you see. We believe first there's only one God. Like

Moses said in Deuteronomy, "Hear, oh Israel, the Lord, our God, the Lord is one." But then along came Jesus, doing the things only God could do. And He said, "The Father and I are one." And he talked as well of the person of the Holy Spirit of God. Then Jesus was raised from the dead as an endorsement of all he'd said and done, which led to a second conclusion, then: God is three. There are three persons in that one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For instance, at the Great Commission in Matthew 28, Jesus told the disciples to be baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is three. Also, God is diverse. Though each person is fully God, each person is distinct from the other two persons. They are eternally different from one another. As Jesus tells us in today's reading in John 16, which will look at it in a few seconds, each has assigned work. God is the creator and owner and sustainer. Jesus is the Redeemer and rescuer. The Holy Spirit is the sanctifier, leading people to believe and to do the very things that Jesus would have them believe and do if he were still visibly active on Earth. And in the Book of Hebrews, we read that the father begot the son, and John tells us in his Gospel that the father and the son sent the spirit. These terms do not mean that one person existed before the other. They simply point to the distinctions between the three, not two events in the sweep of time. And finally, God is a unity: three persons working as one, three torches burning in one holy flame of love. Working together for our salvation.

When it comes right down to it then, the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery. We cannot fully understand or explain with our little frail and finite language and minds. But even though we cannot fully comprehend the fractions of the Trinity, we're called to praise the three persons of the one Triune God for their gracious works and functions on our behalf and to believe. Bible commentator Dr. Vernon Grounds once wrote "Explain the Trinity? We can't even begin. We can only accept it. A mystery disclosed in Scripture. It should be no surprise that the triune being of God baffles our finite minds. We should be surprised, rather, if we could understand the nature of our Creator, he would then be a two-bit deity, though, not the fathomless source of all reality."

Now, as I said just a few seconds ago, we have before us a trinitarian text in John's Gospel that describes for us the workings of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus gives us a picture of the interrelationship and inner workings of the three persons of the Trinity, as he promises the disciples that soon there would be an arrival of the Holy Spirit, the helper. Let's have a look at the text. The setting is Jesus and his disciples in the upper room of a home in Jerusalem the night before his crucifixion. He has told

them he will be leaving them and they were afraid. But then he went on to tell them that they need not be afraid and worry about being abandoned because they wouldn't be. He promises them that he'll be going to prepare a place for them in his father's house, and he would come and take them to himself. And he also tells them that his departure is a good thing, because then the Holy Spirit, who Jesus calls the helper, will come to them and accomplish all kinds of things in them, and through them. They will be well taken care of. He explains what the spirit would be doing in the world in the first part of chapter 16. The Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness, and Christ alone in judgment. And then in our text for the day, Jesus turns the subject towards the Spirit's work in the disciples that would soon be happening on the day of Pentecost and beyond. Jesus says the spirit of truth – when we talk truth mean reality – the spirit of truth will guide you, believers in me, lead the way into all the truth.

So, we have to ask: truth about what? The truth about Jesus. He will guide you to all the truth about Jesus' identity and mission, who He is. He's the son of God, of one being with the Father. He's a long-awaited Christ, the Messiah, come to save us from sin through His suffering on the cross. Jesus says to them that truth the Spirit receives and speaks comes from Jesus and the Father. He doesn't speak that truth on his own authority as he tells you of the things that are to come. What are the things that are to come? First, Jesus means the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension. The Holy Spirit would continue the spoken ministry of Jesus, glorifying Him as being the savior of the world and helping them understand all that was about to take place, which was the terrible crucifixion and then the resurrection, and then then the exaltation, the ascension of Jesus. And He would inform them of all the implications of these events, open their minds to it. At the time, you see, these events were happening the disciples couldn't really comprehend God's rescue plan. But after the spirit of truth arrived, at Pentecost, He helped them to understand and declare Jesus to a sinful world in need of God's forgiveness and eternal life. He would soon lead them and guide them to write it all down and oversee the writing of all the New Testament for others to read and then believe. That's why John says near the end of his gospel, "All these things were written so that those who read it may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have eternal life in His name."

So, on the day of Pentecost, Peter and the other disciples sounded quite enlightened. Remember that story, as he got up and talked about Christ's crucifixion and resurrection and ascension and fulfilling all God's Old Testament promises and then

explaining what all this means for a sinful world that needs to be saved? A great preacher of the past, G. Campbell Morgan, commented on that day of Pentecost, those disciples knew Jesus more than they had known Him over the three years of living with Him. The Holy Spirit then would also go on and reveal other things to come as well. That, for instance, Jesus was for everyone in the world, not just Jewish people, but for non-Jewish people as well, as they began to hear the gospel and come to faith in Jesus Christ to the surprise of Peter and the disciples. He would reveal the big picture of the future for all believers in Christ to trust and hope in through the Book of Revelation, the promise of the heavenly new world to come when Jesus returns with the new Heaven and Earth, the judge of living in the dead, when God will rule over a perfect world without sin and death forevermore.

By the way, just an aside, in the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah says again and again that God alone knows the future. But here in John's gospel, we see the spirit knowing the future and communicating it, thereby showing his full deity as part of the Trinity. He knows the father's mind, for they are one. Notice in this passage how Jesus describes this spirit working in complete harmony with the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit will take what is mine Jesus says, which is the knowledge of God and God's heart, and He'll declare it to you. Then he goes on and says, "All that the father has is mine." In other words, I received all this from the father. So, in revealing Jesus the Son, the spirit is actually revealing the Father, because all that the son has is from the father. And they are one.

So, we have this wonderful picture of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit working together on our behalf in perfect unity and oneness. And it's all rather mind boggling, don't you think? What a magnificent God we have. And praise be to him. This might help us in understanding. An early church father of the second century named Irenaeus, described the way the three persons of the Trinity work together with this image that I found helpful. He says,

Picture the father reaching out with two arms. One is Christ through whom he reached out to redeem the world and now reaches us with the power of the cross. The other arm is the Holy Spirit who works in us, convincing us of Christ's atoning death and our forgiveness, giving us the gift of faith to respond. With the two arms, the father then draws us to his loving heart. Both arms are crucial. Without the arm of the Holy Spirit, it's impossible to appropriate what the arm of Christ has done and does for us.

So, knowing about the Trinity has some positive implications I would like us to consider this day as we walk in our Christian faith. First of all, the doctrine of the Trinity changes the way you view God. We have a tendency to shrink him down a little bit. But this enlarges your vision of him. The Trinity deepens our sense of the depth and mystery of God's nature. It is a rather humbling and mind-numbing thing for us to consider. It puts us in our place in the whole scheme of things. There is such beauty and wonder for us to behold and worship as we examine this. God is so big. And he certainly is not a boring, hands-off deity in the sky, watching us like some old grandpa sitting on the couch watching the kids play on the floor. No, our triune God is bursting with life and love and is active. He's the most holy, loving, living, creating, and fascinating being in the whole universe who can do anything he pleases. Therefore, Christians can live out their days with complete confidence, faith in him who holds this universe in his hand, who controls everything.

This revelation of the Triune God also opens our eyes to the depths of God's love for us. The Trinity is a community of love, doing love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, acting with a holy, perfect love to save you and me. I can't help but be in awe of that kind of magnificent, marvelous, matchless love when I consider it. Pastor and writer Matt Woodley describes all this in this way. He says, "God is a party of love and you're invited into the party. Jesus has opened the door. The father stands ready to embrace you, and the Spirit is there to guide you." And that, my friends, is a whole lot of love that God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has for you and wants to shower upon you. And so, I invite you to join me in delighting in that, and trusting in it and claiming it as the solid truth you can build your life upon.

The big idea of the doctrine of the Trinity is simply this: we have a great, amazing, infinite God who has a great, amazing, infinite love for you and me. And though that truth is hard to fully comprehend with our little finite minds, it's something always to be celebrating and trusting in as we live out our days in this world, waiting for the next.

Now to close this message today. I'd like to use the trinitarian morning prayer of that great evangelical preacher, John Stott. He prayed this each morning until the Lord took him to himself, to his heavenly home. Let's pray. Good morning, Heavenly Father. Good morning, Lord Jesus. Good morning, Holy Spirit. Heavenly Father, I worship you as the creator and sustainer of the world. Jesus, I worship you as the Savior and Lord of

the world. Spirit, I worship you, sanctifier of the people of God. Heavenly Father, I pray that I may live this day in your presence and please you more and more. Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I will take up my cross and follow you, and you alone. Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life – the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Holy, blessed, and glorious trinity. Three persons in one God, have mercy on us. Amen.